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## ABSTRACT

The place to begin curricular change (in response to changing demography and cultural diversity) is with establishing general learning goals that the changes will be designed to address. The first criteria for any curricular decisions for a basic speech communication course should be: change must provide an opportunity for learning that is beneficial for students. The primary thrust of cultural diversity curricular revisions has been attitudinal. Educators have optimistically called for others to join them in spreading the word and ushering in a new era of harmony and understanding. More substantive changes have been reflected in new sections added to interpersonal and group texts and courses that provide specific information about communication practices of each gender and some ethnic groups. Examination of a sample of 10 texts for basic speech communication courses (published in 1994) indicates that: (1) changes to prepare students for a more culturally diverse world have been changes of degree rather than approach; and (2) there has been even less progress in incorporating content to make public speaking texts more responsive than there has been for interpersonal texts. Three of the texts suggest that communication educators are probing for meaningful ways to implement cultural diversity curricular changes that move toward both attitudinal and skill learning. Communication educators need to evaluate or reevaluate their teaching goals based on students' present and future needs related to cultural diversity. (Contains 13 references. An assignment for an introductory public speaking honors section is attached.)  
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Curricular Changes, Communication Skills,  
and Cultural Diversity: The Next Generation

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## Curricular Changes, Communication Skills, and Cultural Diversity: The Next Generation

Addressing the issues spawned from the concept of cultural diversity as a factor in curriculum change in higher education is enormously difficult. Most waves of curricular modification occur after and as a response to some disruptive event such as the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the launching of Sputnik, the passage of the GI Bill. Our present curricular challenges are complicated by having to deal with a combination of pressures from the past, present, and future all at the same time. A look at the faces in our classrooms each fall tells us we are in the midst of a changing mosaic of students with changing needs. Some of us resist curricular change because of sincere convictions about the validity of what we teach now and how we teach it. Others of us are carrying a backlog of frustration, anger, and resentment because of cases in the past where multicultural changes have been mandated without faculty consultation. Many students and faculty members are also carrying an emotional legacy composed of the same emotions of frustration, anger, resentment, because they represent or identify with groups long neglected and oppressed by society. They want their day of recognition and acceptance. They may even demand that curricular changes be implemented to specifically address their needs and desires.

If we can get past the furor aroused by zealots, militant PC enforcers, and grudge-holding curriculum conservatives from the

past and present, we still have a mountainous issue before us. No one doubts the face of America is changing and that communicating in the cultural mixture of the twentieth century will call for exceedingly high levels of flexibility, knowledge, and wisdom. The demographic predictions can tell us what racial, ethnic, and gender percentages will compose the new world society, but no one with any surety can predict what our new **culture** mix will be like. Will there even be a dominant culture? Will the powers that control economics, politics, and media chart a new blend of culture, or will the traditional Eurocentric values and practices still shape our day-to-day practices and interactions both in education and beyond? There are no answers, but educators have a responsibility to prepare students to live in that culture or set of cultures we cannot define.

Rather than attempting to analyze the future in order to match classroom offering with projected needs of students, much of the literature on cultural diversity in education shows that educators have moved directly to practical recommendations for implementing a curriculum that incorporates content and activities related to cultural diversity. Acknowledging that we can only guess what specific information and tools will be most helpful to students in their post-graduate lives, I propose that the place to begin curricular change is with establishing general learning goals that the changes will be designed to address. We need to examine where we want the curriculum to go and why. Then we can choose the teaching content that best matches those goals.

### Bases for Curricular Change

The first criteria for any curricular decisions for a basic course should be: **Changes must provide an opportunity for learning that is beneficial for students.** The student may not recognize the benefits; the learning may not even deliver those benefits, but the intent should be to enhance the student's present and future. Decision-makers are on shaky ethical ground when they revise the content or approach to teaching to redress old wrongs or convert students to their cause without balancing these interest out with an equal or stronger interest in the welfare of the student.

Cultural diversity curricular changes for the basic course that have the potential to benefit the student can be classified into (1) those that address the needs of the student while in college and (2) those that prepare the student for life after graduation. In the first category of within-college-benefits, the first three sub-categories fall under the affective domain of feelings and attitudes: (a) personal validation from public recognition of the student's own culture; (b) a classroom culture of equity and inclusion; (c) opportunities for contact with diverse ideas, experiences, and people in order to expand the student's world view. The final subcategory is from the cognitive domain leading to behavior, (d) communication knowledge and skills that allow students to open the door for contact with those of other cultures and diminish unintentional friction that results from misunderstanding and miscommunication.

The learning that applies most directly to the student's life

in a culturally diverse world after leaving higher education is similar to the final in-college cognitive benefit: communication knowledge and skills that allow graduates to adapt to and benefit from multicultural situations and experiences in home, community, and workplace.

If we assume these goals are the appropriate bases for making curricular decision about topics and issues of cultural diversity for our basic courses, then the next step is to see if current commentary and recommendations from scholarly papers and basic course text books are contributing to meeting these goals.

#### Comparison of Current Recommendations and Resources to Goals

When current practices and recommendations found in journal articles and convention papers focusing on cultural diversity in the basic course (Araujo and Others, 1991: Braithwaite and Braithwaite, 1991) are compared to this list of goals or benefits, it becomes clear that the primary thrust of cultural diversity curricular revisions has been attitudinal, those that impact on the first three in-college goals. There has been an almost messianic fervor and approach as educators have optimistically called for others to join them in spreading the word and ushering in a new era of harmony and understanding based on valuing individuals and the special background each brings to the classroom. This is a very appealing approach. It taps into the idealistic, optimistic nature of many educators. This approach seems possible. It gives us a place to start and only calls for fairly small changes in what we teach and how we teach.

Many of the recommendations that impact on course content changes designed to make communication courses more inclusive have focused on minor repairs or additions. We are all familiar with such approaches as text examples that include names from a cross-section of a metropolitan phone directory, illustration that show males, females, persons of color, older and handicapped citizens. Concerted effort to teach language that is gender inclusive and sensitive to racial and ethnic preferences has been another widespread trend and one that seems to have found wide adoption within and beyond academia. Another approach that has met with enthusiasm is the reconstructing of reading lists to ensure an appropriate balance of authors by gender and racial/ethnic background.

More substantive changes have been reflected in new sections added to interpersonal and group texts and courses that provide specific information about communication practices of each gender and some ethnic groups. Public speaking texts have increasingly focused on audience analysis and adaptation, emphasizing that speakers need to learn about the backgrounds of audience members and tailor message to fit the audience.

In addition to the pedagogical recommendations and influences from print sources in the communication field, some papers also include evaluation of the effectiveness of the success of recommended teaching practices. Have these strategies achieved the desired results? This is always the difficult question when trying to assess learning, especially long term attitudinal and behavioral

changes. The answers at this point are primarily anecdotal, based on informal observations. Some educators attest to positive changes in classroom climate and increased openness and understanding for other cultures among their students. (Araujo and Others, 1991, Braithwaite and Braithwaite, 1991).

My observations lead me to believe that the walls of fear and distrust that separate are still very strong; the partisan habits are still in place; or perhaps it is just inertia that creates the picture I still see of separate cultural camps when I walk into the classroom. The attitudes may have changed; some behaviors may have changed, but deep knowledge and understanding of others may still be an unattained goal. These opinions do not mean educators should be discouraged or give up teaching content and approaches that they sincerely believe are beneficial to all their students. It does mean we are just beginning to discover the magnitude of the task and are still searching for the means and commitment to seriously work toward the goals that center on communication **skills**.

In order to determine if the communication community is moving beyond the first response to the cultural diversity call, I collected the small sample of texts for basic courses with a publication date of 1994 that has come across my desk. The convenience sample of current basic course texts consists of 10 texts: five public speaking texts; three interpersonal texts and one hybrid text. I scanned each text as I leafed through the books page by page searching for sections that focus on cultural



diversity. I was also looking to see if the suggestions continued to emphasize the emotional and attitudinal learning or if authors were making changes that would significantly reshape courses to provide students with a substantial repertoire of new communication skills or strategies to meet their needs in a culturally diverse world.

The first general conclusion based on the 1994 texts is that changes to prepare students for a more culturally diverse world have for the most part been changes of degree rather than approach. Most of the content of the texts continues to be descriptions and prescriptions based on the dominant model of western, male-dominated communication.

One significant addition in the interpersonal texts (Berko, Rosenfeld, and Samovar, 1994; Cuputo, Hazel, and McMahon) is an exploration of the concept of culture and its importance in communication. In addition, both of these interpersonal texts, continue to provide more examples and research results that describe communication behaviors and expectations of female communicators and representatives of ethnic and national groups other than those of white U.S. men. Nevertheless, neither of these texts addresses the issue of significant practical equipment for living and functioning in a culturally diverse world in more than a minor way. There has been no real paradigm shift.

The second conclusion is there has been even less progress in incorporating content to make public speaking texts more responsive to a changing student and national population than there has been

for interpersonal texts. Three of the texts examined have just enough cultural diversity content to even be considered as fitting into first generation cultural diversity approaches (Ayres and Miller, 1994; Beebe and Beebe, 1994; Byrns, 1994). Yes, we see a variety of faces in the pictures and the authors remind readers they need to realize that audience members may represent different culture backgrounds. It is recommended that in a general way the speaker use knowledge of differences to avoid offending and stereotyping in their content and language choices. These marginal responses to cultural diversity impact are contrasted to the continued total commitment to only one model of public speaking.

The one hybrid text illustrates this dichotomy between the interpersonal sensitivity to cultural diversity and the public speaking fidelity to the way we have always taught public speaking. Adler and Rodman's Understanding Human Communication (1994) is one of the front-runners in multi-cultural enrichment through examples, information, and activities in the interpersonal and group sections of the text. When the reader gets to the public speaking component, virtually all messages related to cultural diversity drop out.

In contrast to the texts that represent only small departures from pre-1994 text treatment of cultural diversity, three of the texts reflect both new perceptions about the role of culture in the study of the subject and new ways to share those perceptions with students. The first, Between One and Many by Brydon and Scott (1994), is the most subtle in transformation. These authors have

quietly integrated information and applications that seem to come out of an acceptance that cultural diversity is here and since a variety of cultural backgrounds and experiences are an integral part of student's past, present, and future, we should simply make that reality an integral part of how we study communication. This public speaking text has a section on Rhetorical Sensitivity that inevitably and naturally includes a sub-section on appreciating Human Diversity; a section on Language that inevitably and naturally includes a sub-section on Language and Culture. Likewise the "delivery" section address Multicultural Nonverbal Diversity. These do not read like afterthoughts or the obligatory treatment of the subject, but, again, are inevitable and natural inclusions.

The second text that represents a departure from the past is Gamble and Gamble's Public Speaking in the Age of Diversity (1994). Within every step of the speech-making process, the authors have included special sections labeled "Considering Diversity." These sections include information about cultural expectations, recommendation for applying new insights or information to the speaking situation, and discussion questions.

At the heart of both of these texts remains the same sequential, methodical, speech building process found in the other public speaking texts. The traditional models of outlining and argumentation are advocated. In spite of the serious efforts demonstrated by these two book, they may still not fully address the needs of students and graduates to build and delivery speeches to audiences that come from a cultural tradition of public speaking

that does not replicate the traditional Eurocentric classroom-competition model.

The final cutting-edge text represents a definite separation from the past. W Barnett Pearce's Interpersonal Communication: Making Social Worlds (1994) does not read like any interpersonal book I already have on my shelf. This new generation author does not intend that it should. He rejected the choice to write "an integrative textbook including all the topics taught under the rubric of interpersonal communication" (p. xv) and instead chose to "write a distinctive book that takes what I consider to be the most powerful concepts in the field and make them available for students." In his book-long conversation with students, great chunks are about or build on the subject of culture. He guides the readers to think about the concepts that seem to be universal rather than those that are culture specific. He stimulates the reader to question past conclusions that imply universality for interpersonal behaviors and recommendations. For example, he shares with students his hunch that Knapp and Vangelisti's model of interactional stages "is most accurate in describing romantic relationships among adolescents and young adults in contemporary Western societies or those influenced by Western societies" (p.242). Then Pearce suggests that students interview students and representatives from diverse backgrounds to see if their romantic and non-romantic relationships follow the model.

The last three texts described suggest communication educators are probing for meaningful ways to implement cultural diversity

curricular changes that move toward both attitudinal and skill learning. Using some of these innovations as a spring board, we can consider some of the problems, challenges and possibilities of moving into a new curriculum for a new society.

#### What Happens Next?

Before we commit to the curricular changes that might make the affective, cognitive and behavioral goals a reality for our students, there are several questions that need asking. Is this the task we should and want to take on--not just attitude change, but a shift in skills acquisition sufficient to provide students with the communication tools to move easily between and among diverse cultures? For this goal, the solutions are not easy or quick. This approach requires more than "add-on's." Are we willing to sacrifice our current curricular foci and substitute new content and skill emphases?

Competence in communication between cultures requires more than just reading about what the communication practices of another culture are or hearing an international student report on experiences in her/his country. Skill acquisition always requires practice with feedback and reflection. Embracing skills learning may mean changing the classroom focus from teacher as information-giver to students as information-seekers.

In the public speaking context, the issue is not just practice acknowledging that some audience members may have different cultural backgrounds, but also involve serious concerns about the model of speech making to be taught. No where in the communication

field is the Eurocentric, masculine model more entrenched than in the public speech. Our formulae come straight from the Greeks with minor revisions and revitalization from Campbell, Blair, and Whately before they were shipped over in the 19th century. For many of us, it would be very difficult to turn our backs on our tidy left-brained, rational, three-point speeches.

I speculate that pride in the classical beginnings and the central position rhetoric has played traditionally in a liberal arts education are additional impediments that stand in the way of members of our field being able to even entertain the idea that there may be other legitimate models of argument and speech making. The Beebe and Beebe (1994) text proudly summarizes the historical chain from 4th Century B.C. to the present century. A recent public speaking text that is not officially included in my survey, (because of the 1993 publication date) Speaking in America by Harold Barrett, also produces a chronology of the "giant theorists" (p. 29) who were responsible for the formulation of the "time-tested principles of speech communication."

Although other recent texts are not so obvious about proclaiming the model that produces a linear, logical speech of structured arguments supported by proof as the one acceptable model, they give the same message through repeating in every text the same speech components and processes. It is only fair to point out there have been some exceptions. Several years ago Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin (1981), did provide the opportunity for students to become aware of alternative approaches to logic and reasoning by

including in their text, Communicating: A Social and Career Focus, introductions to Theological Reasoning and Eastern Philosophy. This one example does little to counter the overwhelmingly advocacy in public speaking texts of the same approaches to speech building and persuasion that excludes other models.

However, pride and preference are not the only hurdles those who would bring in alternative models of public speaking must get over. Choosing which model or models to endorse is a major problem. This is one of the places where fortune-telling becomes difficult. What models of speech construction and presentation will be useful to speaker's of the 21st Century? Should an oral report for a group of managers from an Asian or Middle-Eastern conglomerate be based on a model completely different from the same report to managers of a traditional family business in Oklahoma City? Should a speech by a white woman supporting a proposal to a City Council made up exclusively of African-American members borrow elements from the political/pulpit oratory of some African American speakers? Would her adaptations appear to be patronizing, false, alienate her audience and perhaps even jeopardize her mission? Has she surrendered her own voice and betrayed her culture?

When we try to envision a communication course that enables students to have a menu of models of speech-making, the questions continue to fly thick and fast. Can we, should we teach multiple models of speech-making so that students have the comfort and validation of speaking within the frame of their most familiar model? Should assignments require that students practice using

models other than those of the dominant culture? What alternative models would we choose to incorporate? How do those of us who have known only the one paradigm of speech-making learn enough about other approaches to become the "experts" and advocates for multiple approaches?

My position is that we are obligated to ask these questions and to consider significant curricular changes in our basic course to respond to our changing population. I cannot give another how-to plan recommended for all classrooms, nor can I proclaim that I have THE ANSWER. I do believe that we have some clues as to how we can begin to implement curricular changes to meet the needs of a culturally diverse population. One possibility is that we follow W. Pearce Barnett's lead and search for those important concepts that cross cultural boundaries. Another approach mentioned above is to concentrate less on giving students information and more on creating assignments that help students learn how to locate information and apply their findings to whatever new cultural challenges come their way. Students can be guided to become field researchers on their campuses and in their communities. Through real encounters among people from diverse backgrounds discussing questions of significance to all, students can both collect information and practice skills of meaningful intercultural dialogue. (See Appendix.)

Ostermeier (1992) describes an "Attribution Training" activity that is also based on active student involvement. The activity is designed to teach students to become so familiar with the value



system of another culture that they are able to from among possible responses to accurately choose the "alternative typically made by member of the other culture." (p. 3).

Responding to cultural diversity implication for the basic course remains an enormous, complex challenge. I applaud the first-generation of communication educators who started our discipline and their students on the road to awareness of the issues of communicating and living in a culturally diverse world. Now that the pioneers have secured a foothold, I recommend that we evaluate or reevaluate our teaching goals based on students' present and future needs related to cultural diversity and bravely consider curricular revisions to move toward those goals.

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## Appendix

The following assignment is designed for an introductory public speaking honors sections that I will teach Fall 1994. I have not tried it yet, but I'm trying to follow my own advice of looking for ways to engage students in culturally diverse skills learning.

This course promotes incremental learning in speech construction by a series of "support-material" speeches. Students prepare and present individual or group speeches that focus on principles of and practice with the following Support Materials: narration, definition, description, memorization, comparison, argument. Before the Comparison Speech, students are introduced to the traditional western explicit, linear speech structure. Up to that point, they have been required to follow the general process of audience analysis, topic selection, identifying audience outcome goals, and creating a central claim or thesis. However, students for the early speeches are encouraged to discover their own patterns of arrangement and to speak in their own voices. Instruction for argument follows traditional western deductive and inductive patterns. This assignment will follow the Argument Speech.

### Alternative Public Speaking Models

This assignment involves your next two speeches. The first speech will be an oral report based on research about expectations and practices related to public speaking in a culture other than the one that you think of as your culture. You will research public speaking in another culture by at least two of the following

three means.

(1) You may study and analyze the presentation of a speech. You may attend a live performance or use a taped speech. If you choose the live alternative, I would suggest audio-taping the speech if possible for additional study. The video tapes of Landon Lectures in Farrell Library include female speakers, African-American speakers, Latino speakers, Israeli speakers and probably others cultural representatives I do not know about.

(2) You may interview a member of the culture you have chosen to learn about in order to discover audience expectations and speaker and speech conventions in the culture. There are many international students on campus and representatives of a variety of cultures in Manhattan, Junction City and at Fort Riley.

(3) You may read about public speaking in the chosen culture from journal and convention papers. I can point you to specific articles and ways to go about finding the articles.

Some features of public speaking that may follow unique patterns include: voice and body behaviors during presentation, language choices and patterns, topic choices, organization, support for claims, reasoning, persuasive appeals, ritualistic elements. This list is meant to get you started on your analysis and research not to limit your discoveries.

For the second speech, you may choose any topic and any audience outcome goal. However, in planning and presenting the speech, you must implement three practices or features that are characteristic of public speaking in the culture you have studied. Before the speech, inform the classroom audience of the elements

from another culture you plan to incorporate in your speech and also turn in a card listing the elements.